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THE FULL MEASURE OF DEVOTION

BY
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To
MY FATHER AND MOTHER

INTRODUCTION

THE story which goes to make this little volume I had the privilege of reading in manuscript. An hour after it came to me at *McClure's* I accepted it by telephone.

Like all editors, I have had submitted to me during the past three years stories and stories—and again stories—of the Great War. Every author's mind seemed to race in the direction of the conflict that has torn the world. American writers, no less than the British group, attempted, as early as October, 1914, to depict the actual struggle—as they imagined it. The result was pathetic. We

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in the United States knew nothing of the realities of the War then; we know little even now. Therefore what I, as an editor, was most interested in, and desired most to get for my readers, was the story which would show, not so much the actions of the War as its reactions. The vibrations were tremendous; but who could feel them, and, feeling them, transmit them to paper?

I recall no piece of literature—and Miss Gatlin's story, unless I am greatly mistaken, is literature—that has so brought home to me in these perilous days what this War shall come to mean to the mothers and fathers of America. The spirit of noble sacrifice that these parents in "The Full Measure of Devotion"—how fine that phrase of Lincoln's is!—felt and kept hidden from

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each other brings the tears to one's eyes, and something that we dare not name into one's heart. Here is a vision of the day to be—may it not come too soon!—when you and I shall realize the actual agony, yet some of the beauty and grandeur, of this War.

I wish that every one might read this little tale. To read it once is to wish to read it again, and then to pass it on to a friend who will understand. I am proud that *McClure's* published it first, and happy now to have it in this permanent form. It is one of the few stories to keep—forever.

CHARLES HANSON TOWNE.'

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HE COULD not bear sitting on the porch any longer; he got up and went into the dining-room door.

The supper-table was set, with its places for three, but his wife was still out in the kitchen helping Ella, the maid. He could hear them talking. As he listened, the door from the kitchen was pushed open, and his wife brought in some things on a tray and placed them on the table.

“Supper late, mamma?”

“Just a few minutes, papa. Take

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your paper back to the porch. I'll call you."

Was there something strange in the way she uttered the commonplace words?—something in her tone, in her glance? Of course not. Why should there be? The strain was making him imagine things.

He watched her little fluttering, competent movements at the table. Then, with a smiling "shoo!" at him over her shoulder, she went back to the kitchen. What a soft, tender, loving thing she was! Her home and her family were her shrine and her life; beyond that horizon she vaguely knew that other things existed and happened, but they were not real to her.

Stephen Morrow obediently returned to the porch, but by way of the sitting-

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room where he paused to straighten a framed photograph on the wall. It was the photograph of his only son—a stockily built youngster in padded football trousers and turtleneck sweater, a big 'Varsity letter on his chest. Young Steve had gone to France, to fight with the Canadians. He had been gone more than a year, now.

Out on the porch it was almost twilight; the September evenings were shortening. The gas street-lamp at the corner was already lighted, and threw a shining mark across the wet sidewalk. But the rain had stopped, and in the west were faint streaks of mauve and yellow. The wind, however, was still blowing; a group of children seemed to enjoy struggling with it—a happy lot of youngsters. Two or three neighbours passed and

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called up to him. One of them was the Roberts boy, a friend of young Steve's.

"Good evening, Mr. Morrow! Heard from Steve lately?"

The man on the porch nodded and a mechanical little smile flickered across his face. Until a year ago young Roberts had been much about the place, the two pals noisy over their boyish affairs. That was before the house had gone suddenly quiet; before he had given Steve permission to enlist.

Homes like the Morrrows' do go quiet when the children leave. It was one of thousands to be seen, any day, in our inland country; comfortable, unpretentious, where the joys and sorrows of life are lived out in domestic confines. Mrs. Morrow was the type of woman who loves to use her own hands in beautifying

her house and ministering to her family, even though, according to Cherryvale standards, the Morrows were "well-fixed." She was no longer young, but the untroubled paths of her life had left her with the rounded cheeks and soft bloom of youth. In that she took a sort of vicarious pride because of tall young Steve's joy in his "pretty" mother.

Young Steve filled a good half of her vision of the universe. The older Steve pretended to laugh at the way she coddled the youngster; but he himself had been known to leave important business to attend a high-school football match in which his son was expected to star.

Football, baseball, and kindred subjects had always appealed more to young Steve than had the other items offered by the school curricula, and dull text-

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books had little chance with him against a certain brand of lurid literature. This latter reading inspired the organization of many a desperate bandit-gang in the Morrows' barn-loft. Later on the meetings adjourned to porch or yard, and the side-yard resounded with clamour and argument whenever Steve willed to turn it into a baseball diamond. Now and then his parents decided they must call him into conclave to ponder his monthly school report, and he would sit, solemn, and make promises they knew would never be kept.

At last came the period of shaving materials, neckties, tailor-made clothes, and—college. Mr. Morrow did not greatly mind the impending four years' separation; he was already visioning the time when his boy, become a man, would return and take his place beside

him in the store. But Mrs. Morrow could find nothing of amusement in the situation. However, she hid her sickness of heart and occupied herself listing and marking the garments which, for long months, her own hands would not be privileged to touch.

Then Steve went, and the house, for the first time in eighteen years, knew what quietness was like. Whenever Mrs. Morrow came to the point where she could not stand the silence any longer, she busied herself cooking the delectables which Steve loved and which, had the athletic authorities known of their end, would have debarred Steve from the training-table. For already Steve's muscles were winning him attention in the college world—this, of course, to the continued detriment of his reports.

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During his first summer vacation there came, across the seas, a great war which, over night, turned the whole world topsy-turvy. No, not the whole world; quiet backwaters like Cherryvale only shuddered a little. To Cherryvale the news was at first incredible; then, as horrible details persisted in obtruding themselves in the newspapers, War established itself as a sort of fact, terrible yet unreal—like the fact of floods in China, or an earthquake killing people in the Andes.

There was only one person in Cherryvale to whom the war presented itself as an actuality. That was Miss Pilcher, the seamstress. She was a weazened little old woman who had accompanied her brother out from England thirty years before. Her brother did not make

the success he hoped with flower-culture and long ago had died. Miss Pilcher's skill with the needle brought her enough work to supply her simple desires; since she was well-fed and cheerful, Cherryvale did not pause to question whether she was happy in her isolated old age. Most people had even forgotten that she was an alien.

Young Steve had always liked Miss Pilcher; partly, perhaps, because throughout his boyhood he had liked her jar of ginger-snaps, which was never empty. Going to Miss Pilcher's was the one errand his mother had never known him to shirk. He liked Miss Pilcher, too, because she let him tease her and appeared to enjoy it.

The week England entered the war, she was working at Mrs. Morrow's,

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and it was to the sewing-room that young Steve, seeking his mother, came waving the evening paper which scare-headed the tidings.

"Gosh!" he commented enthusiastically. "It's going to be a real row!"

"You mustn't talk that way, Steve," reproved his mother. "War's a terrible thing. I never was so glad before that we live in America."

"Wonder if we won't get mixed in maybe?" suggested Steve.

His mother looked up at him, scandalized. Miss Pilcher reached for the paper, and devoured the headlines through her near-sighted glasses.

"I wish I might go," she said, as she handed the paper on to Mrs. Morrow.

"What! *You* want to be a soldier?" shouted Steve.

"No, I meant I want to go home," said Miss Pilcher softly. "My sister's boys will be leaving, I suppose. I'd like to be there with her."

"And I'd like to be there with *them*!" said Steve.

"Stevie, don't talk that way," said his mother again. But she wasn't really worried. She had no occasion to worry—she was so fortunate as to live in America. Besides, there were plenty of nearer, more vital things to worry about. For instance, Steve's appetite. He ate so much that she was quite sure he didn't get enough to eat at school. In fact, he admitted he didn't. Already she was scheming for the autumn; she couldn't bear to think of Steve's being really hungry.

When he returned to college, it must

be said, she got more thrills out of sending him an occasional big box than out of the stories which were filling entire front pages of the newspapers. Not so with Steve. He was grateful for the boxes and said so, but his letters revealed that the war had not lost its grip on his imagination. However, that was only natural in a boy like Steve, and not disquieting.

It was not until he came home for the Christmas holidays that the first bomb exploded.

He burst upon them, voluble and excited, straining under that veritable anguish of eagerness which all parents come to recognize. It was the manner with which Steve had asked for his first shotgun which, beforehand, he feared was going to be denied him.

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"I've got something I want to ask you," he announced. "You may not see it at first, but when I put it all before you——"

Mrs. Morrow sent her husband a flickering smile, and settled herself to hear some preposterous request.

"Well, what is it now, Steve?" asked the other long-suffering parent.

"It isn't near as wild as it sounds off the bat," temporized Steve, characteristically defending his cause before he named it. "And such a chance will never come again. It would be a crime to pass up such a chance!"

"Suppose you inform us as to what this remarkable opportunity is," suggested his father.

Steve decided to risk all on one brief sentence.

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"I want to go to France!"

Then he held his breath, looking from one parent to the other.

"To France!" ejaculated his mother. "What on earth do you want to go to France for?"

"I want to drive an ambulance."

"An ambulance?" Amazement was still the dominant emotion in Mrs. Morrow's voice.

"Yes. A lot of us fellows are organizing a college unit to work at the French front."

"The French front?" she repeated. "What have *you* got to do with the French front? This country hasn't got anything to do with things away over there. The President says so."

Steve flung out his hands with a despairing gesture, and turning from her

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to his father, began explaining in a rush of words.

"It's all fixed so we can get straight to the front—right behind the big guns! Just think of living here on earth right during the war that'll go down as the greatest war in history and not *seeing* any of it! It'd be a *crime*! I've got to go—I *ought* to go! Don't you see, Pop?"

From Steve's glowing eyes, Mrs. Morrow's helpless ones turned to her husband. He was looking at the boy.

"I don't know that I do exactly see, Steve. Just what is it you want to do?"

"Why I was *telling* you! I want to drive an ambulance!"

"But why do you choose the French? Why not the Germans?"

"Oh, you know why, Pop! We all sympathize with the Allies. The Amer-

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ican Ambulance is already started there—everything will be sliding on greased wheels for us. College men from all over the country are going. Can't you see what a big chance it is?"

"A chance for what?"

"For excitement! For a big time!"

"Yes; but if it's only excitement you want, you can get enough on the football field."

"And with more safety," put in Mrs Morrow.

"Football!" exclaimed Steve. "Football's not one-two-three to a game like *this!*"

"Perhaps not," agreed his father, with that dry finality which sons know so well, "but at the present time it's more in your line."

"Huh!" snorted Steve. "What about

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old Benjamin Morrow, who fought at Concord?—and your own father who never came back from the Civil War?”

“One thing about them both,” replied his father drily: “Neither of them went to war because they thought war was a game.”

“But, Pop——!”

“Let’s drop it, my boy. It’s only upsetting your mother.”

So the matter was, in a way of speaking, laid to rest. But the holiday was not as Steve’s other holidays had been. That was the wet winter when the heavens seemed never able to quit their mourning, and something of the weather’s dreariness seemed to have crept into the Morrow household.

After Steve left for the second semester, Mrs. Morrow once more lived for

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the preparing and despatching of home-made goodies, and for the mail which brought her letters from her son. The ambulance unit had departed, the fervour at college quieted down, and Steve seemed engrossed in trying to "make" the 'Varsity baseball nine. He succeeded, had his photograph taken with the new insignia displayed on his sweater, and appeared, so far as his mother could judge—and as she devoutly prayed—to be quite satisfied.

Then came that May of 1915, with its world-stabbing horror to show how a nation—not a nation shrouded in the darkness of barbaric ignorance, but a nation enjoying the supremest fruits of art and science—may, having once sold her soul to the devil of materialism and greed and pride, run amuck and

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direct the intelligence and skill which were well her boast, to perpetrating hell-brewed crimes.

The *Lusitania* was sunk on May 7th. On May 8th, a smiling morning, young Steve, dishevelled after a night in the sleeper, burst in on his family at breakfast. But he was a strangely different Steve from the one who had come clamouring in that last, unsatisfactory holiday; different from the Steve who had sulkily departed. Now his eyes were alight with a new kind of glow, and, to their anxious inquiries, he answered with a strained calmness they had never heard in his voice:

“I don’t suppose it’s any good to ask —Pop’s so dead set against it. But I want to go to France. Some of the fellows are going to enlist in Canada.

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They leave for the training-camp next week. We'll get in action a lot quicker even than the recruits in England. Won't you let me go, Pop? I'll be twenty in August."

The room began whirling round Mrs. Morrow; and, through the blur, she looked toward her husband.

He pushed away his plate and leaned his arm upon the table.

"You want to enlist? I thought it was an ambulance you had in your eye."

"That was before."

"Before what?"

"Before"—Steve paused to swallow a click in his throat—he hated emotion—and went on steadily, "before I read old Miss Pilcher was on the passenger list, I think."

Tears rose in gentle Mrs. Morrow's

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"Yes, it is horrible about Miss Pilcher," said Mr. Morrow.

"And that isn't all!" said Steve. "That made me see how horrible, how damnable the whole thing is! I didn't get it before. Of course I realized that the Belgium business and all the other things you read of are ghastly, but I didn't *get* it. Not even when I read about the *Lusitania*. I thought I got it, but I didn't really. There was a cartoon—little babies and women struggling in the water, and death's-heads coming up alongside, and skeleton fingers dragging 'em down. It gave me the horrors. Then I saw Miss Pilcher's name in the second-cabin list; and then, the queerest thing, I seemed to recognize *her* in that cartoon. A poor little old woman with her mouth open, and thin, straggly

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hair all down over her face. She looked scared to death—died scared, with that look set on her face. And I remembered how Miss Pilcher used to look—and her jar of ginger-snaps! Then I began to get it. Sneaking up on a weak little old lady like Miss Pilcher! That's what *they* call war! Why, they'd do it to any woman!—to Mom there, even, if they got the chance! That's the kind they are! They're not soldiers—not *men*, even! They're mad dogs! And they've got to be stopped. They've *got* to be! Good God! Don't you see, Pop?"

Steve's eyeballs were straining out as if in an agony to help expression. Mr. Morrow stretched out one hand to cover his son's, and the other he reached to his wife.

She clutched it.

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"Oh, papa! Tell him he *can't*! You *told* him he couldn't."

"But, Mom——"began the boy.

She interrupted him, arguing blindly:

"Anyway, you're too young to know about such things. Only twenty years old!"

"Mom, do you know how old Lafayette was when he landed in this country to fight?"

"No."

"Not quite twenty years old!"

She changed her tack:

"Wait and see what the country does. Maybe we'll have to go into it."

"We ought to be in it—just as Roosevelt says!"

"Anyway, just wait and see, Stevie. I wouldn't mind so much, maybe, if you had to fight for your country."

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"Well, what is it but your country that you fight for, if the Germans kill Miss Pilcher?"

"If it gets down to that," replied Mrs. Morrow, "Miss Pilcher was English."

"Miss Pilcher came from right here in Cherryvale! And what did the Germans care where she, or any of the rest of them, came from?"

"But, Stevie, wait and see——"

"I tell you this thing won't stand waiting! And it's bigger than for country—it's for ordinary human decency; for all the things that made Lafayette and his men come over and help us a hundred and forty years ago. If we're any good at all, we must go now and fight for the same principles, and help pay back our debt to those Frenchmen."

Mrs. Morrow searched blindly for

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further arguments. Then, impotent, she complained:

"But I don't see why it must be *my* boy. Out of all the hundreds of thousands of boys, why must it be mine? And you're just *one*, Stevie. What good can just one more do?"

At that, amidst the grimness, the boy and man permitted a flicker of a smile to pass between them, a smile of masculine understanding of the hopelessness of arguing against the feminine point of view. But the father did not give the answer his son longed to hear.

"We'll let the matter rest, Steve. Your mother and I will want time to think it over. You'd better eat your breakfast."

He rose, and squeezed the mother's hand again. Mrs. Morrow would have liked to add a hundred protestations.

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But, instead, being a wise woman, she kissed Steve, asked him what he wanted for his breakfast, and went out herself to prepare it.

And young Steve, as the young can when a critical issue is adjourned, ate the last bite of a three-egg omelet. It is the fathers and mothers who do not eat when sons are going off to war.

"Oh, papa!" pleaded Mrs. Morrow, later. "He *mustn't* go. Show him he *mustn't*!"

Mr. Morrow stroked her hand.

"If he feels about it the way he does," he said, "I don't see how we can show him. Don't you see? It's hard, mamma," he went on gently, "but sometimes parents have to go through these things. They have to fortify themselves with the knowledge they've children to

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be proud of. We ought to be proud of Steve, mamma—his soul's on fire."

At last she realized that her cause was lost. She must give in to masculine ideals she could hardly comprehend. She knew that if she was to have her husband and son proud of *her*, she must not lament. And when she came to that realization, she rose, as women will, to the emergency.

When she spoke her consent, her husband's heart ached with pity for her. He knew her "yes" was only with her lips, her Spartanness only skin-deep. His heart ached the more because, in so many ways, she was like Steve. He had always noted the resemblance between Steve and his mother; except, of course, that she had the natural timidities and softnesses of a woman.

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However, next morning, she came down in heroic mood. And, when she kissed Steve, neither of her men-folk could have told, from her appearance, that a hot, burning pain choked her throat or that the furniture in the room wouldn't stay still.

Steve gulped when they told him their decision. Apparently he had not dared hope they would let him go. He sat down in a chair as if thoroughly exhausted. When he looked up at them there were tears in his eyes. Till then his mother hadn't known how great had been his suspense.

Finally he put to his father the question his mother had put the night before:

"How'd you come to let me go now, when you refused the other time?"

"I had no choice this time, my boy.

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Last winter you were planning a hooray-boys kind of lark. It wasn't worth the risk. But your mother and I feel that when your soul's in a thing, we haven't got the right to dictate. Don't we, mamma?"

Mrs. Morrow nodded her head.

II

Steve had a week before he and his friends were to leave for Canada. He didn't go back to college, but wired and had his things packed and sent home. After that first grimness, he grew very gay, and followed his mother about her household tasks as he hadn't done since he was a little fellow. But his talk, of course, was all of the days to come.

"I wish I knew more about motors,"

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he said once. "Maybe I could work into the aërial service later."

"Oh, Stevie! Don't go to trying to think up *worse* things! The trenches are safer than those awful machines."

"If a fellow is dated to get his, I guess it won't make much difference where he is."

Mrs. Morrow, as she bent over his trunk, turned her back that he might not see her face. Young Steve, hater of emotion, crossed over and laid his arm for a moment across her shoulders. Then she dared wipe her eyes.

"I think maybe I could see it," she said, "if it wasn't *you*. I just can't get used to thinking it must be *you*."

"You'll see it in time, Mom," he said, cheerfully sorting out a riotous heap of beloved shirts that would never see fighting.

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She went on counting socks, laying in neat piles those which must be darned or marked.

"I wish I could see you in the uniform," she said wistfully.

"I wish so, too," muttered Steve. "In the uniform of my own country."

"You won't forget to have a picture taken, Stevie? I'll frame it and hang it the other side of the mantel to balance the one in the football suit."

Steve laughed. "I'll bet, Mom, that by the time I come home, you'll be the best soldier in the land."

Steve's last day at home arrived. All day the house seemed overflowing with chattering young people who had run in to say good-bye, making of his departure something of a festal occasion. But Mrs. Morrow, upstairs packing, felt that each

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thing she laid in his trunk or bag was a fragment of her own heart. Even in times of peace and no event, no one so loves any inanimate thing as a mother loves the intimate pieces of her son's clothing: the socks she had darned or will need to darn, the garment on which she had sewn so many buttons.

After she had packed and repacked his bag "to better advantage" until there was no more time to keep up the sorry game, she went into the kitchen to supervise his last supper at home. Every dish should be something Steve especially loved.

"Hooray! Beefsteak pie!" Steve rewarded her when he saw the golden-crusted confection which only his mother knew how to make. "I certainly hate to think of having to go so long without any of your beefsteak pie, Mom."

"We'll have it again the first day you get home, Stevie," she promised, ladling an extra amount of the gravy on his portion.

After supper they had to hurry to catch the "seven-fifty," which was to carry Steve away. Both Mr. and Mrs. Morrow went to the station with him. On the way home Mr. Morrow said to her:

"You can cry now, if you want to, mamma."

She pressed his hand for the wealth of his comprehension.

They returned to the house, talking of Steve. It is strange how changed a house can look when just one person is gone. And, as if trying to bring things back to naturalness, they sat late, talking of him; travelling back through the years, piecing out each other's memories.

The next day she put away the things in his room. Steve was not a tidy boy, and now, for the first time, she was glad for that. She was thankful to be kept busy with his belongings. She cleaned out the big closet in which was stored the steam-engine, the magic-lantern, and other toys of long ago; she dusted the football suit and spiked shoes and baseball bats he might never use in play again; she rearranged the cupboard containing some articles of outgrown clothing she could never bear to give away; fingering the well-remembered things each of which recalled a dozen vivid pictures.

That night she confided to her husband that the hardest part was going to be facing that unchangingly neat room.

Then they talked of him again.

Life for them resumed its orderly

routine—for Mrs. Morrow the daily tasks at home, for Mr. Morrow the trips downtown to the store and trips back home at night. And all around them Cherryvale went about its tranquil, uneventful business. Cherryvale, absorbed in its own little concerns, still read of the tremendous happenings overseas as one reads a thrilling story-book. To be sure, more ships were stabbed in the dark and sunk, more lives of Americans lost; but it was decreed that these were foolish, venturesome Americans whose selfish risks should not be laid to the nation's account. At every such recurrence there penetrated to Cherryvale vague tremors as to the result. But, even now, Cherryvale was not really uneasy; this war was a foreign thing. Somehow the President would fend it away from Cherryvale.

To the Morrows alone the war was close and vital. When Steve, in the fall, left the training-camp in Canada and sailed with his comrades to France, the bare word "submarine" in a headline was enough to make their hearts catch. When they read the reports of battles in the trenches, they heard the shells singing through the air before they struck; saw blinding clouds of fire; smelled the suffocating gas; felt the fear of the threatened; heard the groans of the smitten. The local papers did not present the hideous pictures in sufficient detail, so Mr. Morrow subscribed to several New York dailies. These they eagerly awaited to read anew of the world in which Steve was living. It was the world in which they, too, really lived; only their bodies, the husks of them, had existence in Cherryvale.

"We're still holding 'em at Ypres, mamma," Mr. Morrow would announce, coming home and displaying the first-page headline to her. "They're pounding at Hill 60, but we're holding 'em."

And Mrs. Morrow would get out the big maps she had cut from the New York papers and study anew the lay of the land, as if she didn't know every mile of it by heart.

They had to familiarize themselves with all the battle fronts, for they didn't know at just which of them Steve might be. That was one of the worst features, not being able to lay finger on one definite spot and say, "Steve is here—we must watch this spot closely!" But his address was vaguely "somewhere in France." His letters, too, were unsatisfactory in that they must tell nothing of

the things which they were so eager to hear. They were notes, pencilled in Steve's big, angular scrawl. He was well; the inclosed snapshots—in uniform!—would prove that. They were not to worry. Of course the life wasn't soft, but they were to remember that he was a husky brute and could stand it. The men he was with were a fine, jolly lot. He was proud that, under those foreign flags, there were thirty thousand Americans working to keep human decency alive on the earth. And so long as there was a successful outcome to look forward to, a fellow couldn't help keeping cheerful.

Thus ran Steve's letters. But of his own risks, of his daily activities, there wasn't a word. Mrs. Morrow found herself worrying over the most absurd trivialities.

"He never speaks of his food," she complained. "Stevie always had such a big appetite. I wonder if he gets enough to eat?" Or: "I wish he'd tell me about his laundry. And his mending."

"His mending!" Mr. Morrow laughed at that.

"Well, you know how [fussy Stevie always was about his mending," she returned defensively. "He'd never wear a sock if it was darned so he could feel it."

"I guess he's got hardened to darns," said Mr. Morrow. "He's not thinking of darns, anyway. Steve's changed, mamma—he's a real man."

And Steve *had* changed. His requests, when they wrote asking what they might best send him, was for money to buy the soldiers cigarettes. Tobacco, he said, was Tommy Atkins' favourite invest-

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ment; when Tommy was wounded, if you gave him a cigarette (provided he had a hand left to lift it to his mouth), he'd smile as if the world had set itself right again.

Steve liked Tommy Atkins. He liked Tommy's strong language, his unexpected gentlenesses, his irrepressible humour under all conditions. He said he had learned to be proud of the English blood that, from way back, must be in his veins; he was proud of the bed-rock quality in it. Also he liked the French. He got but brief glimpses of them, but they were brave, sweet, cheerful people. The French civilians couldn't do enough for the soldiers. And what he learned of their hardships, of the sufferings of the children, was heart-breaking. He wished he might only lay hands on some

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of those old clothes and toys of his, packed away and doing nobody any good!

At that last letter Mrs. Morrow looked thoughtful.

"Maybe I do wrong in keeping Stevie's things," she said. "Maybe I should give them to some poor children where they'd be doing some good. He would like me to—he was always so tender-hearted. But I just can't bear to let them go. Do you think I *should*, papa?"

"You do just as you want to," he replied.

"I couldn't bear to give up his high-school baseball suit. I can see Stevie, now—he'd always come rushing in, red and perspiring, his hat over his shoulder, shouting for something to eat. Stevie

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was always hungry—I *do* wonder if he gets enough to eat over there.”

“Of course he does, mamma. Stop worrying.”

“Well, I know I’ll feel better when I get him home where I can cook for him myself. Isn’t it cute, the way he keeps reminding me of my promise about the beefsteak pie?”

“What’ll you bet that you *do* forget it?” They laughed together at Mr. Morrow’s little joke.

Not once, since that last meal with Steve, had they had beefsteak pie. Mrs. Morrow didn’t explain the omission, and her husband never asked the reason. He didn’t need to; he understood that the favoured homely dish was being withheld, as a sort of sacrament, for their boy’s return.

III

Their boy's return! It was of this, of the long months they had waited, and planned and talked of it, that Mr. Morrow was thinking, in the August twilight, as he paced the porch waiting to be called to supper. This was what he had been thinking of for six long days, for six endless nights.

Hideous days and nights, he hiding the grief which had all but killed him, till he should find some way to tell her which would not kill her outright. Six days, going to work just as if the world had not turned void and futile; six days, returning to eat—to *eat!* She would suspect something if he did not eat. And she mustn't suspect till he had found the way to let her know. For, if the

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news had done this to him, what would it do to her? Though she had acted so bravely, he felt that she had never grown reconciled to Steve's absence, in her heart had never understood the reason for his going. So, when she should learn, she wouldn't have even that frail reed to lean upon. It would be easier to tell her, if she only understood. Poor little mamma! Such a soft, tender, loving thing! Her home and her family were her shrine and her life.

The day after he received the cable, a letter had come to them from Steve. The usual scrawl, pencilled there by Steve's big, muscular fist—his live fist. The pencilled words fascinated him horribly: to think those marks could survive and talk after the hand that wrote them, the brain that directed them, were gone!

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Yet he contrived, somehow, to read the letter with Steve's mother, just as they always read his letters.

The next morning, when he came home, he found his wife up in Steve's room. But it was not, just then, a room to pain one with its neatness; it outrivalled Steve's most riotous days.

"What in the world are you doing, mamma?"

"Just sorting out some of Stevie's things."

"What for?"

"I've been thinking over Stevie's letter about the little French children—Stevie always was so tender-hearted. These little-boy suits might fit some of those poor youngones out in Stringtown. See, papa! Here's his first pair of long pants—remember?"

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Mr. Morrow crossed over and pressed the hand displaying the cherished trousers.

"You're as good a soldier as Stevie, mamma," he said.

She smiled at him then—an odd little bright smile.

Then she pointed out the piles of shoes, shirts, gaudy ties, prosaic underwear, assorted out on the little white iron bed. Chairs were loaded with the favoured literature of youth, bound and unbound; and with dog-eared text-books, and the mechanical magazines which boys pore over. There was the steam-engine and the magic-lantern, a tool-box, a battered kodak; and a mountain of athletic paraphernalia.

"Those baseball and football things will make some boy happy, I guess,"

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said Mrs. Morrow. "But I'll keep some little things—maybe the baseball cap and belt."

"Yes," Mr. Morrow managed to say.

"I always think of Stevie all dressed up in some kind of rig," she went on. "Anything like a uniform. I never knew a boy to love it so much, way back to his first 'real' sailor suit—remember, papa?"

He nodded.

"I'll bet the day he got his soldier uniform he strutted like a turkey-cock. Don't you?"

"Expect so."

"I'm glad he's sent us so many snapshots—I feel as if I'd actually seen him in uniform; I wanted to so much."

"I left my pipe downstairs," said Mr. Morrow, and hastily left the room.

Mr. Morrow paced up and down the

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porch in the deepening gloom. Inside he could hear her putting dishes on the table. Presently she would be calling him, and he must go and face her under the revealing gas-light.

Across the street the children could still be seen playing in the dusk, still fighting the wind. An unseen voice called to them:

“Come, children! Come! Bedtime!”

A shout of protest; and the mother’s voice again.

Then, from the dining-room door, he heard his wife’s voice, the summons he had been dreading.

“Supper’s ready, papa.”

He got ready a smile for his lips, and went in. She had a smile waiting to meet his. The strong light blinded him at first. He had pushed her chair into

place and taken his own seat before he noticed the contents of the big platter before his plate.

“Why—mamma!” he stammered.
“Beefsteak pie?”

For, before him, steamed the crusty brown dish that husky young Steve had preferred, the delicacy he had bespoken for his first meal at home.

“Why—mamma!” he repeated thickly, not lifting his eyes, “I thought——”

Then he felt her soft hand upon his head; she had noiselessly crept round to him.

“Papa,” she said, “Stevie will never come home.”

Suddenly he lifted his head.

“Mamma—you know!”

She nodded, dropping to her knees beside him. For minutes they held each other close, not speaking.

Finally he asked:

"How long have you known?"

"Six days."

He started. "How—?—why didn't you tell me before?"

"I've been praying for the courage, papa. I was afraid it would kill you."

"But surely you knew I knew!"

"Did you?"

"Six days."

They stared at each other.

"I went to the store that afternoon," she explained. "You were out. I saw the cablegram on your desk. I thought of Stevie first thing. So I opened it—oh, papa!"

She bowed her head, and he laid his cheek against her pretty soft hair.

"I carried it home with me," she went

on. "I didn't want you to learn that way—so hard."

"They'd already 'phoned it from the telegraph office," he told her. "I was out walking, trying to get a grip on things."

"Oh, darling! All alone!"

He kissed her commiserating eyes. Presently he said:

"We may never know where his grave is."

"All France is his grave," she answered proudly. "More than that—every free country, every country where liberty and justice and idealism are cherished, will be Stevie's grave, forever."

He gazed at her, thrilled. His pride in her, his wonder at her, for the moment rose above all other feelings.

"Mother," he said, "you're like Steve—through and through."

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"Stevie was right," she said softly, "just the way those young Frenchmen were right who came over here with Lafayette. They were fighting for the same things Stevie fought for. A hundred and forty years ago there were mothers in France who lost sons over here. There come times in the world, I guess, when fathers and mothers just have to go through these things. Stevie has helped pay back the debt to those young Frenchmen who never went home; and you and I are paying back the debt to those French fathers and mothers who grieved a hundred and forty years ago."

Tears came into Mr. Morrow's eyes. They were the first tears that had been shed.

THE END

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